

## JESSAMYN LOVELL

### Blurring the Lines to Help Students Find Their Way

[ By Amy Touchette ]



Jessamyn Lovell's power as an educator is partly due to the fact that she teaches what she actually practices. Winner of CENTER's 2013 Excellence in Teaching Award, Lovell says her passion for

photography stems from its ability to blur lines between fact and fiction, "to explore in-between truth and tell different versions of the same story." It's a powerful experience because when those boundaries are gone, the world becomes a beautifully wide, inclusive place—the ultimate setting in which to make—and teach—art.

Perhaps it's this feature of photography that has allowed Lovell to evolve so admirably, despite the hardships she endured while growing up in Central New York. When Lovell was just 11, her father left the family. Without his support, "life became a difficult struggle," she explains. "At times, survival was more important than going to school or doing the right thing."

Interestingly, this painful crossroads also produced a very positive, life-changing gift: photography. Shortly before her father left, he gave Lovell a point-and-shoot camera with color



**Above and right:** Lovell explores families in rural settings in "Backyard Nursing," 2012, from Lovell's series "Domestic Landscape" and "Mommy with gun," 2004, from the series "Catastrophe, Crisis, and Other Family Traditions," in which she returns to photograph her own family in central New York.

film. She made her first photograph during this tender, soul-searching time, while underneath a pine tree looking up through the branches and into the sky. Years later, through "a series of serendipitous events" she managed to make it to college, eventually earning a bachelor of fine arts in photographic illustration from Rochester Institute of Technology and, shortly afterward, a master of fine arts from California College of the Arts (CCA).

During graduate school, Lovell took her first teaching job in the juvenile justice system to do something she cared about while making ends meet. After graduating, she reluctantly took a position teaching photography at CCA but "instantly loved teaching college,"



Lovell says. This, in turn, led her to teaching positions with different age levels and various types of programs and eventually to her current position of visiting assistant professor at the University of New Mexico.

According to Anita Enriquez, one of the students who recommended Lovell for the CENTER award, Lovell teaches her students to embrace so-called "failures" to the point that this label ceases to apply. Whether blurring the lines between success and failure for her students or between fact and fiction in her photographs, the result is the same: a wide-open expanse in which all is possible—especially self-discovery.

It's a path that has served Lovell well. As the recipient of several awards to date, including the 2008 Aperture Portfolio Prize, she says receiving CENTER's 2013 Excellence in Teaching Award "feels extremely validating. It means that I might be doing something right." **EDU**

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